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ABSTRACT

In 1986 Bemidji State University (BSU), located in rural northern Minnesota, began an outreach distance learning program for the preservice education of elementary teachers. This college program delivers junior and senior year education courses to students 100 miles plus from the main campus. Junior and senior year requirements are completed in a 3-year cycle, with most courses provided in the evening or on weekends. Generally, students are graduates of community colleges in Minnesota's economically depressed "Iron Range," are older than average and hampered by family responsibilities, and are experiencing economic hardship and career change due to labor force restructuring. This presentation provides background on (1) BSU, (2) recent economic problems in northern Minnesota, (3) student characteristics, (4) arrangements with education faculty members to integrate the distance learning aspect of the department, (5) student processing and orientation, and (6) program design. A proposed course schedule and a map of BSU's Center for Extended Learning service area are included. (SV)

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RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: A MINNESOTA OUTREACH MODEL

Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to describe an outreach distance learning program for the training of elementary teachers at the baccalaureate level.

The objectives of this program are:

1. To deliver baccalaureate level training to students 100 miles plus from the main campus.
2. To place elementary teacher education within the reach of students who are generally:
   a. older than average.
   b. experiencing severe economic hardship.
   c. in the midst of career changes due to a fundamental restructuring of the nation's work force.
   d. unable to attend a traditional undergraduate program because of family responsibilities.

With respect to rural focus, this program is designed to deliver elementary teacher education to students who live in and will study in one of the most rural areas of the nation. It consists of the junior and senior years of teacher education. The program is delivered over a three year cycle. The students take twelve to fourteen quarter hours of instruction each quarter. The majority of the courses are provided in the evening and on weekends. Most of the students work outside of the home or have major child care responsibilities during the day. In the last quarter of their third year they must change to a daytime schedule to complete the student teaching requirement.

Introduction

Bemidji State University qualifies as a rural teacher education setting by almost any standard. We are located in a sparsely populated area known as Northern Minnesota. The institution is in the city of Bemidji which has a population of a little more than 12,000 and is located approximately 250 miles north and west of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area which is the dominant cultural, economic, and political center of our state. We are relatively isolated not only by distance but also by harsh winter conditions for approximately five to six months.

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The institution itself will soon be seventy years old. It opened in the fall of 1919 under the name of Bemidji State Normal School with 38 students and has since grown to an institution of just under 5,000. Also, much to the chagrin of our catalog writers, it has maintained a sharp focus on the preparation of teachers in a wide variety of fields.

The Past

Within the educational service area of Bemidji State is an ethnically mixed area known as the Iron Range. For at least the last 15 years, the pressure has been building to have more higher education programs on "the range." There had been a great deal of speculation about how baccalaureate programs could be offered there; mostly by the range residents themselves. There have been community college programs available for more than a generation, but over the years this level of preparation has become less and less sufficient in our rapidly changing and upgrading world.

The catalyst for the present program started with major changes in the processing and manufacturing of steel products of which taconite pellets are a major ingredient. When this market changed, the economic repercussions were felt in the range communities very quickly. Mass lay-offs and a rapidly expanding depression grew with startling speed. This set the stage for action.

Student Background

In 1985, a group of potential elementary education majors who were attending local community colleges or were graduates of those institutions, started a petition to obtain some form of advance training in the range communities. This was necessary because most of these would not be able to obtain the training without having it brought to them. They are predominantly older than average students with complex lives of multiple commitments. Many have families with dependent children. Most of them tend to live in poverty and are probably best typified by the descriptions of the working poor. Many of them are working two or more part time jobs at low pay. Their employment situation is very precarious psychologically. They feel that they could lose their positions at any time. They have minimum to no fringe benefits or job security and they feel completely at the mercy of their employers.

Staff

We have been able to accomplish the entire program without outside grant support. A number of reasons account for this. The major one is the cooperation and flexibility of the faculty. The majority of the senior faculty have been very helpful and

voluntarily committed themselves to the goals of this program. Also, the distance learning aspect of our department has been discussed in the job interviews of the new faculty and has been included in their contracts.

The majority of the classes have been taught on overload for extra pay. This reimbursement is based on 1.5% of the individual professor's nine month contract salary, and ranges from $400 to $714 per credit hour. We also make use of adjunct faculty. Their salary is negotiated with the Director, Center for Extended Learning, who uses the faculty salary schedule to determine the appropriate level of compensation based on extent of training and experience.

Student Processing and Orientation

Word of mouth and poster advertising are used to encourage students who have completed or will soon complete an associate of arts degree from one of the range community colleges and to apply for program admission. Once they decide to apply, they are told to send their transcripts to the external studies office. After an initial screening, the papers are sent to the Department of Education where they are evaluated and the student is admitted to the elementary education program or informed of deficiencies to be removed.

The majority of students are admitted during the fall quarter. A few exceptions are made for students with unusual records, but an attempt is made to hold each cycle to thirty plus students and we try to keep each together so that the majority can be ready for graduation at the end of the third year.

When this program was first designed, it was thought that the students would all go through the first two years of the program and that the third year would be taken as part of our internship program where the students spends one full academic year with a mentor teacher. Only approximately 40% of the first cycle of students were able to do this because of financial and other lifestyle considerations. As a result, the third year of the program was split into an extension offering and an internship. Informal indications at this time seem to dictate that approximately one half of our students will stay in the external studies and the remainder will take the internship option.

The Program

In the first year of the program which began in the fall of 1986, five courses were taught or a total of thirteen quarter hours. (See figure 1) Winter quarter consisted of six courses for a total of eighteen quarter hours and spring quarter consisted of four courses for a total of thirteen quarter hours. Students receive financial aid on the basis of credits taken with

twelve hours or more needed for full time enrollment, 9-11 credits for 3/4 time enrollment and 6-8 credits for 1/2 time. Five or less credits are not eligible for financial aid. If the students follow the cycle sheets and complete the work satisfactorily, they will graduate in three years. Some students are also able to come onto campus for one quarter or a summer session. When this is possible they are then able to jump ahead in the cycles and finish in less than three years. Another way to look at all of this is to say that we deliver two full academic years of course work over three years time. The reason being that the typical range student takes 12-13 hours per quarter while the typical on-campus, full-time student takes 16-18 hours per quarter.

The second and third years can be seen in figure 2.

The Future

In conclusion, I would like to quote from an unpublished paper recently presented on a topic very close to this one:

The Center

> The development of an Iron Range Center can be seen as a natural outgrowth of all the activities mentioned heretofore. For some time residents in the area had expressed dissatisfaction with the idea that there was no four-year institution in the immediate area. This had caused some of their legislators, one in particular, to push the University of Minnesota at Duluth to offer more courses in that area and to ask for funding to explore the unmet needs of the area.
>
> The Center for Extended Learning became aware of the actions of this legislator and took positive steps to let him know that BSU had long been active in serving the needs of his constituents. It was pointed out that interest in the area preceded the current economic slump and that there were numerous instances of students successfully finishing programs through distance learning. The administration took the lead in communicating with him and indicating a willingness to discuss the matter further.
>
> In January of 1988, Senator Ronald Dicklich was invited to campus to visit classes and meet with faculty and staff who participated in taking programs to the Range area. He supported the efforts of BSU and indicated a willingness to introduce legislation to support a feasibility study to determine whether a permanent Iron Range Center should be put in place to expand and reinforce educational services.
>
> BSU has been awarded a $50,000 grant to employ a Coordinator who will work with two consultants to conduct

the study. The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and the College Board are now conducting the study. This report will be presented to the Northeast Minnesota Higher Education Consortium - BSU, UMD< College of St. Scholastica, and the Arrowhead Community College Association - and to the legislature in February.

At this point in time, it is impossible to predict what the study will actually prove. The Center for Extended Learning feels very positive, however, and is delighted to see a real exploration of educational needs. Looking at the events which have preceded the study, it is impossible not to feel a sense of pride. The concept of Distance Learning has been providing educational opportunities to this corner of the state for over thirty years. Whether the study indicates a need for a permanent center or not, all indications are that educational activities in this area have not yet peaked.

Reference

Cecil, Lorraine F., Distance Learning: A Viable Alternative - unpublished paper presented at 11th Annual Conference, Quality in Off-Campus Credit Programs: Challenges in Innovation. Sponsored by Kansas State University.

Figure 1

PROPOSED COURSE SCHEDULE FOR THE IRON RANGE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJOR-88/89

Year 1 (Beginning the program Fall Quarter of 1988)

Fall Quarter			
ED 300	2	Elementary Major	Pre-clinical Experience
ED 310	2	Elementary Major	Curr. and Foundations
ED 353	3	Elementary Major	Elem Art Concept & Mthds
ED 366	4	Early Chldhd Field	Foundations
Winter Quarter			
ED 321	3	Elementary Major	Human Relations
ED 344	2	Elementary Major	P E Methods
ED 376	4	Early Childhd Field	Communications
Spring Quarter			
ED 343	3	Elementary Major	Social Studies Methods
H 391	4	Licensure Req	Health & Drug Education
ED 381	3	Erly Chldhd Field	Tchg Children w/ Sp Needs
ED 367	3	Erly Chldhd Field	Relations & Management

Year 2 (Began the program Fall Quarter, 1987)

Fall Quarter			
ED 346	4	Elementary Major	Reading in Elem School
ED 347	3	Elementary Major	Language Arts
PSY341	4	Early Chldhd Field	Child Psychology
ED 451	2	Spec Ed Field	Screening, Diag & Assess
Winter Quarter			
ED 416	4	Elementary Major	Diag & Rem Instr in Rdg
ED 351	2	Elementary Major	Music Methods
ED 342	3	Elementary Major	Tch Math in Elem School
ED 309	3	Elementary Major	Children's Lit
Spring Quarter			
ED 440	3	Spec Ed Field	Math-Exceptional Learners
SW 301	4	Early Chldhd Field	Parent-Child Relations
ED 348	3	Elementary Major	Science in the Elem Sch
ED 468	3	Early Chldhd Field	Child Development

Year 3 (Began the program Fall Quarter, 1986)

Fall Quarter			
ED 325	5	Elementary Major	Psych Found of Ed
ED 385	3	Elementary Major	Mainstreaming Exc Lrnr
ED 313	3	Elementary Major	Measurement & Evaluation
ED 322	2	Elementary Major	Util of AV Resources
Winter Quarter			
ED 315	2	Elementary Major	Orient to Stud Tchg
ED 314	3	Elementary Major	Class Mgt & Discipline
ED 424	8	Kdgn licensure	Stu Tchg - Kindergarten
ED 427	7	Elementary Major	Elective Stu Tchg
Spring Quarter			
ED 427	16	Elementary Major	Student Teaching

Figure 2

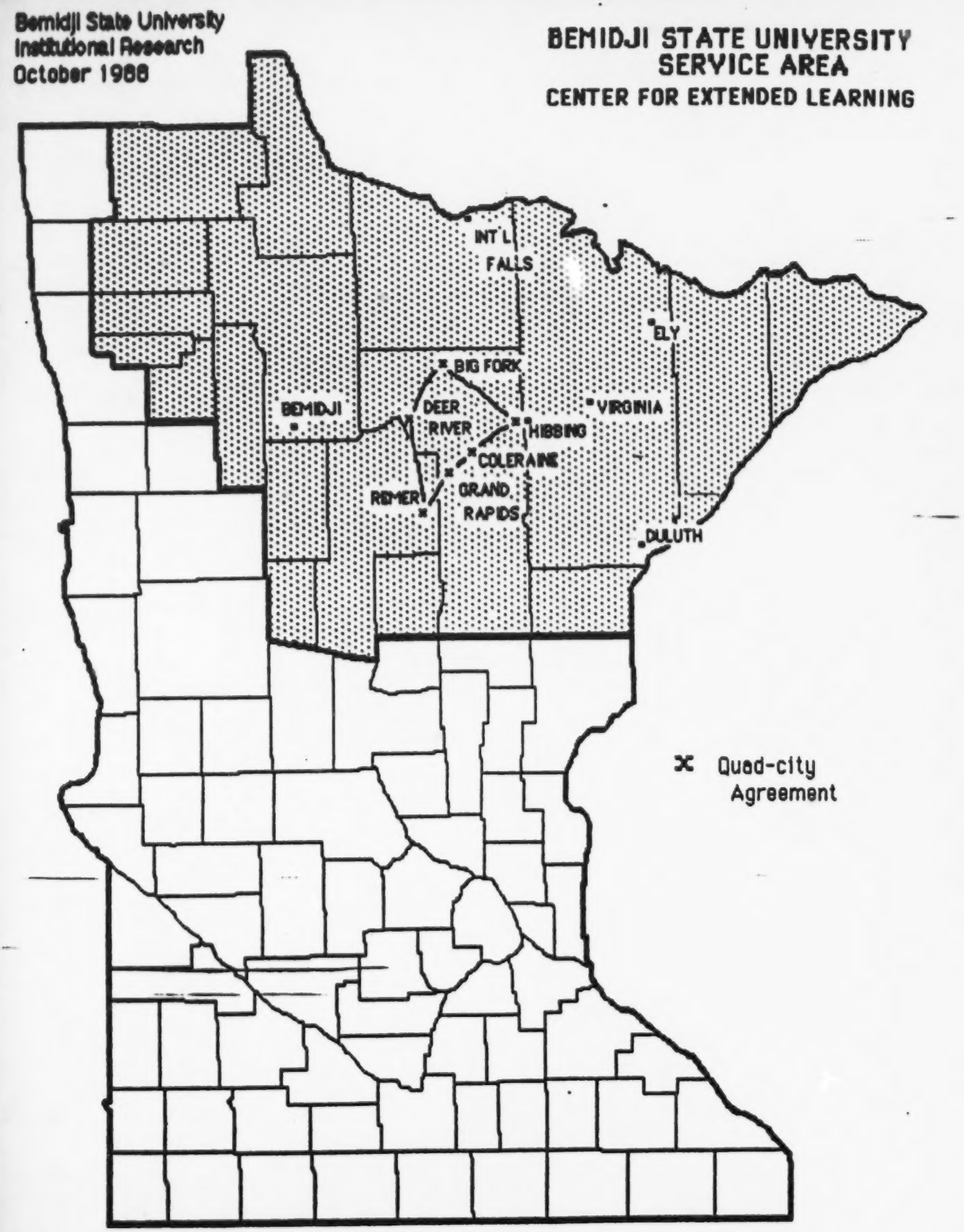

Figure 1